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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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TO ALL STATE DIRECTORS OF EXTENSION:

Subject: Current Farm Labor News - #27

"M. C." Wilson is up and around at his home, 3005 S. Dakota Ave., N. E., following an illness of several weeks and an operation. The doctor promises that "M. C." will be taking everything in his stride within the next couple of weeks.

John D. Hervey, Assistant Chief of the Recruitment and Placement Division, returned from his assignment as escort of Kentucky workers to Montana suffering with a severe sore throat. His doctor has diagnosed his ailment as scarlet fever. Rest and generous doses of penicillium are resulting in rapid recovery.

Labor for sugar beet harvest short. Securing adequate labor to meet sugar beet harvest needs is proving to be the biggest farm labor job this year. Strong competition from cotton areas offering good wages has diverted many workers who formerly harvested sugar beets to work in the cotton fields. Satisfactory progress is being made to date in the sugar beet harvest by the limited labor force available due to increased use of harvesting machinery and to excellent weather prevailing.

Interstate domestic workers recruited in Kentucky, Tennessee and Oklahoma are proving to be a valuable addition to the sugar beet work force. 1,235 such workers left these states for Montana and Colorado during the first part of October and are expected to return to their home states the first week in November.

State Extension Services from the sugar beet states have been cooperating closely with sugar companies in securing workers from other sources. Contracts with sugar companies for the recruitment and transportation of Latin-Americans from Texas or Mexican workers from Mexico have been signed for a total of 6,741 workers.

Maine potato harvest completed. The Maine potato harvest this year was completed in satisfactory manner without the use of interstate domestic workers. Full use was made of local domestic labor and large numbers of workers were secured from the Canadian areas adjacent to the State of Maine. This latter source of labor was the major source of help during prewar years and was again used to the fullest extent this year. The satisfactory harvest of this crop this year has proven that it is possible to return to prewar sources of labor.

Returning from a 3-weeks study of mechanization of the sugar beet harvest in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana and Idaho, with Western Area Director Gaylord and Extension Photographer Hunton, Hugh F. Eames, Extension Farm Labor information reports:

"Mechanized harvest has arrived" in the opinion of farmers, processors, state farm labor experts and farm machinery manufacturers;

In 3 or 4 years at the most, if farmers can get the machines they now seek, mechanized harvesting will have reached maximum utility; 10,000 machines will do the job, manufacturers say; not more than 5,000 of all types are now on the farms;

At least 50% of the crop will be harvested mechanically in 1948 if farmers can get the machines they now have on order, compared with 10% or less in 1946, and about 30% in 1947; mechanized harvesting has now reached the point where processors say 'weed control' rather than problems of hand workers, is their principal headache; 'controlled planting' is scheduled for much emphasis.

In the current harvest, now running well ahead of progress at this period in 1946, three conventional topping and lifting machines are doing work that is generally acceptable. Successful operation varies from field to field, according to conditions of the crop, soil and weather, the scheme under which the planting was done, and the skill of the operator;

A fourth machine--a beating device which bares the beet crown of leaves and stems --may revolutionize conventional harvesting if processors will accept whole beets. At least two companies are accepting whole beets this year and running tests in processing, but make no promises as to 1948 acceptance;

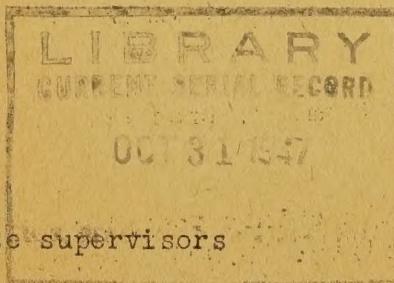
In using whole beets (beets with complete crowns) the processors' problem is that of determining what effect the mineral content of the crown and impurities found there, have in the chemical processes of refining sugar; the farmers' problem is that of measuring the value of the sugar content of the whole crown against the feed value of the beet tops which are lost in the beating process; some lifters which follow beaters, are using a simple knife attachment which takes a thin slice off beet crowns;

Manufacturers of the three machines principally in use in the mountain states are accepting 1947 models as standard basic machines to which improvements can be added, as they are developed, thru substitution of parts.

Opinion in the field appears to be that the most acceptable combine in the future will be a one row and one operation outfit, powered by any adjustable tractor, that will lift, top and elevate beets into a truck, or into a cart following the combine. Multiple row outfits will be used largely in California and elsewhere where acreages are large.

Custom work is developing at rates ranging from \$1.60 to \$2.50 per ton for lifting, topping and loading. The \$2.50 rate is admittedly too high. The \$1.60 rate represents the hand labor cost for topping and piling. Custom work likely will be limited to an average 100 acres a season. However on October 15, some machines had already harvested 90 acres and were still going. Groups of 2 to 4 farmer's are cooperating in buying an outfit for joint use.

Prospective elimination of most all of the thousands of hand workers within 3 or 4 years poses a new problem in social economics: how to utilize the thousands of common laborers who will be displaced. Working in the fields near the machines this year, they see the handwriting on the wall, and are not resentful, because the job they are doing is mighty tough, back breaking, and a repelling task.



Yours very truly,

Barnard Joy
Barnard Joy, Acting
Deputy Director of Extension
Farm Labor Program